



News Release

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Hundreds of Utah Children Hurt Needlessly in Car Crashes

Studies Show Booster Seats Could Save Many Lives

(Salt Lake City, UT) – Each year more than 680 Utah children ages five to nine are injured in motor vehicle crashes. Utah Department of Health (UDOH) injury experts say many are hurt because they are not buckled into a booster seat.

“Many parents believe that, once their children reach age four or five, they’re ready to leave the car seat for an adult seat belt,” said Gary Mower of the UDOH Violence and Injury Prevention Program. “But until they are at least eight years old, most children are too small and too short to ride in a car without a booster seat,” he said.

The correct use of booster seats lowers the risk of injury by 59 percent compared to seat belts used alone. Yet only 25 percent of Utah children ages four to eight are restrained in booster seats.

Trauma experts at Primary Children’s Medical Center (PCMC) say they see the worst injuries among children who were either unrestrained or buckled into adult seat belts during a crash. “In 2005 we admitted 38 children ages four to eight for car crash injuries,” said PCMC trauma program manager Kris Hansen. “Of those, only four were properly restrained in a booster seat. Sixteen weren’t buckled at all and 14 were in adult lap and/or shoulder belts,” said Hansen. “Four children were thrown from the vehicle and it’s unknown if or how they were secured.”

Strong occupant protection laws are a proven way to help parents remember to buckle up their children. Many parents rely on these laws as a guideline to help keep kids safe.

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Page 2 of 2 – Utah Children Hurt Needlessly in Car Crashes

The UDOH supports HB 111, a measure that would mandate the use of booster seats for children up to age eight or who are at least 4' 9" tall. Thirty-three other states and the District of Columbia already have laws that require booster seats. Among those states:

- Five require boosters for children up to age six
- Seven require seats up to age seven
- 10 states mandate booster seats up to age eight
- 12 require booster seats to age nine

Motor vehicle crashes take a significant financial toll on the state. Utah hospital and emergency room charges for children ages five to nine involved in motor vehicle crashes totaled over \$2 million in 2003. Data from the Intermountain Injury Control Research Center show that government programs, not private insurance, pay for 85 percent of all motor vehicle crash costs. And it costs more than twice as much to treat an improperly restrained victim than one who is buckled into a booster seat.

“Children in adult seat belts often suffer very serious spinal and internal injuries,” said Hansen. “When the seat belt rides over the abdomen instead of the lap, the impact of a crash can tear the liver, spleen or bowel, or result in spinal fractures that can cause paralysis or loss of bowel or bladder function,” she said.

“Booster seats raise a child up in the seat so that the seat belt fits correctly, offering better protection from crash and seat belt injury,” added Mower.

For more information, contact Gary Mower at 801-538-9145 or visit the UDOH Violence and Injury Prevention Program Web site at <http://health.utah.gov/vipp>. More information on safety restraints can also be found at www.utahsafekids.org/.

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